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John Driscoll

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Committee:

- Health Care & Wellness
(*vice chair*)
- Higher Education
- Transportation

State Representative **John Driscoll**

6th District

2010 Legislative Session Review

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Well, the 2009-10 legislative term is in the books, and it's fair to say that most citizens and most of my fellow lawmakers are glad to see it in the rearview mirror. It's very good to be home again in Spokane.

If you're taking the time to read this newsletter, I imagine you've kept up with events in Olympia. You know we came into the session in January of 2009 facing a budget hole of nearly \$9 billion. You know we cut billions in spending, and filled in the rest of the hole with federal stimulus money and by transferring some existing funds from different accounts. There was no tax increase, even though 30 other states in similar situations did raise taxes last year. I was proud of that.

Fast forward to January 2010. The recession continued, and this year's deficit hovered around \$2.8 billion. The first bill we passed in the new session cut spending some more. Sixty days later, we adjourned without a state budget or a revenue package, and had to go into overtime.

And of course you're well aware that in that overtime session, most legislators – I wasn't one of them – eventually voted for an assortment of revenue enhancements (that's tax hikes in plain English) as well as a budget that in terms of state dollars, actually spends less than the previous budget.

You may not know that state spending shrinks in the new budget, because it hasn't been reported that way. And you may be surprised – I was – to learn that this is the first time that's happened since 1951. Seeing the budget shrink just a bit didn't bother me; I've advocated that for quite a while. I'm just sorry it was brought about by an international recession that has affected so many of us in such a significant way.

And I'm sorry that we didn't shrink the spending even more, to avoid the tax hikes. It's fair to say I'm more conservative than many of my colleagues in the majority party. I voted against suspending Initiative 960, which required a 2/3 vote of each legislative chamber to create new taxes or increase existing ones. I voted against raising taxes every time we debated the issue. And in the end I couldn't vote for the operating budget, either, even though I strongly supported many of the things in it.

I believe you sent me to Olympia to advocate for the things that matter here in the 6th district: K-12 schools that really do teach our kids. World-class colleges and universities. An economic climate that helps our businesses, especially small businesses, thrive and create good jobs. Affordable, accessible, high-quality health care. Government efficiency. Fair, reasonable taxes and smart spending. Safe streets and communities. And compassion for the most vulnerable among us – our elders, our children, our disabled friends and family members.

That's why I asked for this job two years ago, and those are the priorities I've worked for. I'll try to fill you in here on how things have gone. There's not much room, of course, so I hope during the coming months to visit face-to-face with as many of you as possible. My district office is up and running, my door is open, and even though the Legislature has adjourned till next January, I still work for you. For that I'm grateful. Frustrating as it can be at times, it's an honor to play a part in our representative democracy.

And did I mention? It's good to be home.

Sincerely,

John Driscoll
Proud representative of the 6th legislative district



State Representative John Driscoll 6th District

The \$794.1 million question



We may as well get this out of the way right up front: Yes, the Legislature raised a number of taxes, some small, some not so small, some temporary, some permanent, that will bring in nearly \$800 million in the current biennium. To be fair, I'll acknowledge that a good portion of that takes the form of closing tax loopholes that have allowed out-of-state companies to play by a more lenient set of rules than our home-grown businesses. But even when you take those out of the picture, it's still a tax increase, and a lot of people aren't happy about it.

In case you skipped page one, I want to repeat here that I'm one of those unhappy people. I voted against these tax hikes – repeatedly. It's not that I disagreed so much with many of the worthy budget items this revenue is intended to pay for. I simply don't feel we did all the budget-cutting we could have, and should have, before turning to the taxpayers.

For what it's worth, as a member of the majority party, I had many long and heartfelt discussions with colleagues about the inadvisability of raising taxes. Many cast their 'no' votes alongside mine. Of those who voted 'yes,' it's interesting to note that not a single one did so enthusiastically. None.

In fact, for many, this was the first tax vote they'd had to take in their legislative careers. The reason I mention this? It's not to apologize for people who reluctantly did what they felt they had to do. It's to point out something that only someone who has gone behind closed doors with the majority could know: This is likely to be the last tax increase we'll see out of Olympia for a long time. There is a growing conviction among lawmakers, especially new ones like myself, that real and effective government reform is the path we have to take. We saw some steps in that direction this year, and I'm convinced we'll see many more. I intend to lead that effort.

Rewriting the budget

As I've said, the revised state budget that ultimately passed is the first in six decades that spends fewer taxpayer dollars than the previous one. That's a positive move. But as I've also mentioned, my vote on the final budget was 'no.' If we'd tightened our spending belts just a little more – about two-and-a-half percent – we could have done without every dime that the tax increases will raise.

On the bright side, this exercise gave lawmakers their first taste of reducing, rather than increasing, state spending; we cut \$4.40 in spending for every dollar in new taxes. I do believe the recession, unpleasant as it is, will be remembered as the era when government was forced to discover that it could get by on less, and still do more.

Victories, solutions, and good news



I was honored to meet with Spokane-area Chamber of Commerce representatives in Olympia earlier this year. If you and your family, or a group you belong to, would like to arrange a visit, please contact my office. It's your state government.

Spokane Aerospace Technology Center

Washington has been and still is the aerospace capital of the world. But at a time when today's cutting-edge technology is tomorrow's old news, we've got to keep up to keep ahead. That's why I

worked to obtain funding for Spokane Community College's (SCC) Spokane Aerospace Technology Center (SATC). Thanks to \$350,000 in this year's supplemental capital budget, SATC will have a 25,000-square-foot home at Spokane International Airport, where students in SCC's aviation maintenance training program can learn the skills to keep Spokane and Washington state at the head of the line in the 21st century.

Medical Education

People from all over the Inland Empire come to Spokane for the outstanding quality and array of medical care our city offers. It makes perfect sense that students from the region should be able to come here to receive a medical education, as well. We're already a Mecca for nursing students. An extension of the UW dentistry program allows eastern Washington students to study at WSU's Riverpoint campus.

And for two years now, WWAMI Spokane has given medical students the opportunity to spend their first year here at home before heading to Seattle. I'm working to expand that innovative program to a four-year med school, so we can produce our own physicians where they're needed most. In the meantime, I was able this year to win \$250,000 to help WWAMI, WSU, and local physicians and hospitals develop a business plan for expanding the already outstanding medical residency programs in Spokane.

2010 Legislative Session Review

Riverpoint Biomedical and Health Sciences Center

Of course, having the ability to train medical professionals is one thing, and having a place to train them is another. Last year, I worked to have more than \$4 million set aside in the capital budget toward design and construction of a new biomedical and health sciences building at Riverpoint. Since then, in anticipation of eventual approval of a four-year med school, school officials and architects have determined that nearly doubling the original plan for a 53,000-square-foot building would make the most sense. So this year I made it a priority to secure an extra \$3.5 million in the supplemental capital budget to cover the additional design costs. We made our case and the new money is included in the supplemental budget. It's a relatively small investment that will pay dividends for generations to come in Spokane and eastern Washington.

Insuring the uninsured, protecting taxpayers

We all know that a federal healthcare bill has become the law of the land, and it's sure to bring changes to how we do things here in Washington. I'm serving on the state insurance commissioner's Healthcare Reform Realization Committee to help Washington take advantage of every positive aspect of the federal health-care reform. In the meantime, we know that providing emergency care for uninsured individuals is more expensive than helping them to become insured. Because of that, I advocated for and succeeded in obtaining funding for a pilot project to provide healthcare to low-income uninsured citizens here in Spokane County who are currently on the Basic Health Plan waiting list.

North Spokane Corridor



Last year, my fellow Spokane legislators and I were able to secure \$173 million in the state transportation budget to speed up completion of the North Spokane Corridor project. This

year, Sen. Patty Murray went to work in the other Washington and managed to bring home a \$35 million TIGER (Transportation Initiatives Generating Economic Recovery) grant for the freeway. The money will be used to pave the four-mile southbound stretch between Francis Ave. and US 395.

Education Reform

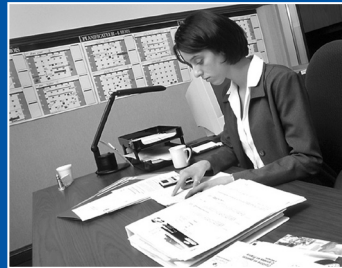


If you don't have a clear idea of where you want to go, it's not likely you'll get there, and especially not anytime soon. Unfortunately, that's an apt metaphor for the way the state too often approached education reform in the past. We'd start off in one direction, then get sidetracked.

We'd turn around and end up where we started. We would argue about who got to drive. In the end, we went nowhere, and our kids, teachers, employers and communities are the worse off for it.

I'm happy to say that's been changing over the last few sessions. Last year the Legislature culminated several years' work by passing a landmark basic-education bill that essentially created a blueprint for comprehensive restructuring of the state's education system and a roadmap to get us there. This year we followed up with necessary next steps, including legislation that establishes a new school-funding model, increases accountability in our education system, outlines new strategies for turning around persistently low-performing schools, shrinks class sizes in the early grades, stimulates pre-K learning, and helps us recruit and train talented new teachers. By passing these measures – and putting them into practice – we've positioned the state to receive as much as a quarter of a billion dollars in federal "Race to the Top" funding.

Standing up to insurance companies



I'm not one to demonize insurance companies. They provide valuable services, they provide good jobs and careers, and I've never seen the point in trying to pit different groups against one another. But fair is fair, and when constituents come to me with problems, I try to solve them.

That's why last year I introduced legislation that prevents insurers from kicking clients waiting for organ transplants to the back of the line if their employers change their health insurance.

This time around, I sponsored another bill that allows employees a full 31 days to find a new insurer if their employers drop their coverage. I understand the financial pressures that many businesses are facing, and I feel for the small-business owner who has to choose between laying off an employee or dropping their employee health coverage. I'm committed to revitalizing Washington's economy and making it easier for small-business owners to cover their workers. But in the meantime, this new law will give those workers a little breathing room when they're suddenly told their coverage is ending.



Please
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here



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WHAT’S ON YOUR MIND?

The 2011 Legislature convenes in less than eight months. What do you see as the major issues we’ll be looking at when the new year begins? I’ll list a few options, but please don’t be bound by those. I’m looking for your input, not just your opinion of mine.

- ☐ Controlling state spending
- ☐ Education reform
- ☐ Public safety
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Jobs & the economy
- ☐ Higher education
- ☐ Small-business assistance
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

OPTIONAL INFORMATION

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

E-mail address: _____



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